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Commissão para os Direitos do Povo Maubere
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Submission to the
United Nations Special Committee On Decolonization

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by Ana Corrêa da Silva

Mr. Chairman and honourable members,

I wish to thank you for the opportunity that you have granted our organization, CDPM, the Commission for the Rights of the Maubere People, to address this Committee about the Indonesian colonization in East Timor.

In recent years, the world has experienced such deep political and social changes that references to these changes have already become commonplace. The point I would like to stress here is not so much the changes that have already occurred, but those that are presently underway, and, most of all, those that will undoubtedly take place in the near future. The United Nations itself, being a reflection of an evolving world process, is clearly making an effort to rethink and redefine its role in the international order, a process that will probably transform its structures.

In this context, the question of colonialism cannot be separated from the major shifts that have recently taken place in the world community, the UN and international law. Colonialism should be considered in the light of its current shape and features.

There is clearly an effort to bring to a new light situations that were considered by many to be closed issues. Eritrea is a case in point, as an example of a problem that had a successful outcome despite the fact that, when it first appeared, was not even on the UN agenda.

There are other situations that need to be considered under a new approach. One of those situations is that people who were once colonized have now become colonizers of other peoples. This is clearly the case of Indonesia regarding East Timor. Today, the problem of East Timor, which has always been on the UN agenda, is also beginning to be acknowledged as a colonial problem by world public opinion. Mr. Chairman, I would like to quote a few extracts from two réputable newspapers, the American *Boston Globe* and the European *Irish Times*. On May 24 1993, the *Boston Globe* published an editorial about Indonesian colonialism in East Timor under the title of "Indonesian Injustice:"

quote "As citizens of a nation founded on an anticolonial struggle, Americans have good reasons to identify with the people of East Timor - a people crushed under the boot of Indonesian occupation.(...)

"This is the heart of the matter. Until Indonesia's colonization of East Timor is ended, Americans should expect their president to demand that Xanana Gusmao and all his colonized compatriots be safe from Indonesian violence." end of quote

The *Irish Times* referred to the same question in its editorial "Indonesia's Shame," on June 8 1993:

quote "All the classic hallmarks of a colonial occupation ring through the trial and conviction by Indonesian authorities of Xanana Gusmao." end of quote

If we apply the traditional European model of colonialism to the case of Indonesia and East Timor, we will surprisingly find that it fits completely. The essential features of old colonialism prevail, as there is no question about the military occupation, political repression and economic exploitation carried out in East Timor by Indonesia. But today's world is more critical towards colonialism than it was in the past and the Indonesian regime, itself a victim of Dutch colonialism, has found some new and more subtle ways to disguise its colonial rule over East Timor. The Non-Aligned Movement elected Indonesia its president

in tribute to Indonesia's glorious anti-colonial struggle in the fifties and beginning of the sixties. Today, Indonesia tries to use this forum to denounce the colonialism of other countries while advancing its own colonial rule over East Timor. It pretends to be the liberator of the Timorese people from the Portuguese colonial yoke and a disinterested benefactor, in order to avoid, or at least subdue, international concern. The very first paragraph of the Indonesian Constitution reads "that freedom is the right of all nations and therefore colonialism must be eradicated from the face of the earth because it does not conform with humanity an justice" and Indonesia often uses this tone in its speeches and words. We should not, however, let ourselves be misled by the rhetorical hypocrisy of these words and must, instead, take a look at the facts.

What is real situation *in* East Timor and what is the real situation *of* East Timor?

The difference between these two situations may sound strange, but we believe there *is* a difference.

This year has been marked by two major events on the inside and on the outside of the island - the arrest and trial of Xanana Gusmao, the East Timorese national leader, and the approval of a United Nations Human Rights Commission resolution condemning Indonesia for its violations of human rights in East Timor. These two events reflect a deeper, paradoxical reality – on the one hand, the oppression inside the colonized territory of East Timor has intensified, and on the other hand the international community has never been as aware of East Timor and willing to act.

Inside the territory, the oppression of the East Timorese is increasing. There is, of course, a more conspicuous side of this repression: the endless and sadly known list of the horrors perpetrated by the Indonesian army, the massacres, tortures, arbitrary detentions, disappearances, rapes, and so on. But hidden behind this repression, Indonesia is developing ways to control economic, political and cultural levels of Timorese society. The Indonesian-controlled oil and coffee monopolies, are extreme examples of the expropriation by force of Timorese resources. The colonizer imposes its own political structures and social organisation, as well as its cultural values. The colonized children have to learn the occupier's language, the occupier's history, the occupier's ideology. I would

like to quote from a letter written by the parents of the children massacred at Santa Cruz to human rights supporters two months ago:

> "We are a people with a national identity which has developed throughout generations. Our culture, traditions, language, customs and religion set us apart from others, particularly Indonesians. We were brought up with deep values which despite our weakness and poverty as a people underline the strength of our personality, different to Indonesians."

In a deliberate government policy to outnumber the local population, Indonesia is encouraging massive waves of transmigrants from Indonesia to East Timor, taking land and jobs from the East Timorese people.

I would also like to call your attention to the situation of the political prisoners. Their trials are illegal and unfair. We don't know anything about of the condition of many prisoners, including Xanana Gusmao, Mauhuno, and Saturnino da Costa Belo. After the visit of Mr. Amos Wako, 13 prisoners were deported from Dili to various places in Indonesia. Access to the prisoners was so restricted that the International Committee of the Red Cross publicly announced that it had to suspend visits to them.

But outside East Timor, as already mentioned, the international community is reviewing its approach to the problem. The press quotations mentioned above are but a few examples of the wider reality of changes in public opinion. In addition, there is growing awareness in the more restricted but more powerful political and diplomatic milieus. A letter supporting East Timorese rights was sent to President Clinton by 43 of the 100 U.S. Senators. Also in the USA, the Congress voted to cut off military aid to Indonesia, in the first substantive measure the U.S. ever took against Indonesia over East Timor. Dozens of influential international personalities, including several Nobel peace prize winners, appealed to the UN Secretary-General, expressing deep concern at the situation of Xanana Gusmao and demanding his immediate release. The United Nations Commission of Human Rights approved a resolution strongly condemning Indonesia for its gross violation of human rights in East Timor and calling for a greater participation ~~by~~ of the UN. In the Bangkok preparatory meeting for the World Conference of Human Rights, which included governments and NGO's

from the Asia-Pacific region, these NGO's, for the first time, publicly supported the rights of the East Timorese to self-determination. Even in Indonesian society there is growing criticism of the situation and greater willingness to discuss it.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of this Committee, the UN has proven that it has the mechanisms to solve this kind of problem, as the case of Eritrea has already shown and the case of Western Sahara will soon demonstrate. This mechanism is a referendum, but there are some necessary preconditions, including access to the territory by independent human rights observers, the release of all political prisoners and the participation of the East Timorese people in the ongoing negotiations between Portugal and Indonesia under the auspices of the Secretary General.

All colonial empires must come to an end. As Portuguese, we know this from our own experience.

Thank you